



Mira Nair  
directs Tabu in  
*The Namesake*,  
during filming in  
Calcutta.

# Mira Nair's **NAMESAKE** Blends Two Worlds

By KRITTIVAS MUKHERJEE

**F**or Mira Nair, life in exile—voluntary or imposed—is always good material for cinema. In her next film, *The Namesake*, filmed in Calcutta and New York, she doesn't stop at examining the theme of emigration, loss and a longing for home, but also explores the emergent dynamics within the Indian immigrant community in the United States.

It was during one of those long flights across the Atlantic that Nair picked up *The Namesake* for a quick read. When she finished the debut novel by Pulitzer Prize-winning Jhumpa Lahiri, she was seized by a strong creative urge that made her change a few things in her life. "For one, I immediately put two of my other films on the backburner and decided to first make *The Namesake*. It was an urgent feeling and I dropped everything in my life to get down to making this film," says Nair. "I liked the book because I identified with it so much. It so rightly catches the modern pulse of the South Asian culture in New York. The city's South Asian scene is really pulsating."

With *The Namesake*, Nair picks up a theme that tries a synthesis of the new world (the adopted country) with the old world (the native home) instead of either patronizing the world of nostalgia of older immigrants or portraying the cultural confusion of the younger generation.

Set in 1970s Calcutta and 1990s New York, *The Namesake* tells the story of an immigrant Bengali family—the Gangulys—which tries to "blend the new world with their old culture."

While parents Ashoke (Irfan Khan) and Ashima (Tabu) long for the family and culture that had enveloped them in India, their son Gogol (Kal Penn) is torn between finding his own unique identity and his heritage.

"*The Namesake* is the story of the sacrifices our parents made for their children. It is a deep human way of telling the story of millions of us who left one home for another, who have known what it means to combine the old with the new," says Nair. □

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**About the Author:** *Krittivas Mukherjee is a Calcutta-based journalist writing on politics, business, social issues and cinema.*